

region of eastern Asia also holds other known Asiatic strays, including Slaty-backed Gull, Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) and Vega Gull (*Larus vegae*), which are yielding increased sightings in North America. In fact, the winter of 2007-2008 provided an unprecedented number of Slaty-backed Gull reports. They were reported from both coasts as well as from several inland locations around the Great Lakes.

Despite the extreme rarity of a 'Kamchatka' Gull being found in southern Illinois, this wouldn't be the first time a sighting of this magnitude occurred. During the winter of 1983-1984, the first Slaty-backed Gull for North America away from Alaska was found along the Mississippi River

near St. Louis, fifty miles west of Carlyle Lake (Goetz, R. et al. 1986). Soon after this sighting, Slaty-backed Gulls started to be found along the coast of California. Perhaps lightning can strike the same spot twice.

**Editor's Note:** The Illinois Ornithological Records Committee accepted this bird as a Mew Gull (Stotz 2008), writing that "we could not at present be certain that this individual belonged to *kamchatschensis*, but that the evidence was generally supportive of that identification."

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## Three rare sea ducks in central Illinois

By Matthew Winks



*Long-tailed Duck.*  
12 December 2007.  
Bloomington, McLean County.  
Photo by Matt Fraker.

The winter season of 2007-2008 provided a unique opportunity for birders in central Illinois to view rare sea ducks as they passed through the middle of the state. Aside from Clinton Lake and the Illinois River, sea ducks, especially the less common species are difficult to find in this area. Ironically, I took a trip to the Indiana lakefront on 10 November 2007 to see some of the more difficult-to-find sea ducks. Excluding a couple of Red-throated Loons and a Great Black-backed Gull, the trip was unproductive. It was two favorite local spots in central Illinois that ultimately provided me with three great life birds.

The first goodie was a Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) on 25 November 2007 at Evergreen Lake. That day, the John Wesley Powell Audubon Society had just returned from a field trip to Clinton Lake, where we had a good diversity and number of

ducks, loons, and grebes, but nothing unusual. First we had miserable cold rain, and then came an annoying barrage of ice pellets.

Despite the nasty conditions, I decided to check Evergreen Lake on my way home. While scanning the lake from the boat launch I noticed a lone duck on the far side of the main basin (Woodford County). It was stocky and dark overall with a pale cheek and a stout bill.

Black Scoter crossed my mind, but I figured it was probably just a Ruddy Duck playing tricks on me. The bird was too far away and visibility was too poor for me to call a bird with which I had no experience. So I called my good friend, Matt Fraker, who always seems to answer the phone and help me identify anything different I find. He happened to be en route to his nearby farm and decided to see the bird himself. I packed up my scope and field guide and went

to search for a closer vantage point. On the north side of the lake, I found a spot where you could hike in and get much closer to the duck while being concealed by vegetation. After a quick look from this distance, it was obvious the duck was too bulky while the head and bill too relatively small for a Ruddy Duck. The pale cheek was rather muddy and had a faint vertical line across it. I was looking at a female or immature Black Scoter. Matt met me a few minutes later and we had the pleasure of watching this bird preening and diving for 30 minutes. The Black Scoter stayed at Evergreen for three more days until another cold front passed through.

My next encounter with an unusual sea duck in McLean County was